



Some came to guffaw, others to gasp... the heaving auction room as Joel Morehu-Barlow's possessions went under the hammer in Brisbane yesterday

MARK CALLEJA

Prince a fake, but everyone wants piece of real thing

TRENT DALTON

CHAIRMAN Mao, Jackie Kennedy, a blue piranha, a silver carp, a black stallion and 3000 curious Queenslanders squeezed into an auction house yesterday to gasp, guffaw and bid for the seized possessions of fake Tahitian prince and \$16 million fraudster Joel Morehu-Barlow.

"No more through the door," screamed a harried spotter as hundreds spilled out the double doors of the Antique and Fine Art Auctions house in Woolloongabba, in Brisbane's inner east.

Some came for the bargains — Chanel brooches from \$100; Bulgari diamond rings from \$600; a Chairman Mao ornament from \$50; an acrylic painting of Jackie Kennedy from \$200; a blue piranha statue from \$300; a life-size black stallion lounge-room lamp from \$3000; Hermes saddle from \$2000; and a large silvered deer head from \$100.

Others came for the bragging rights. "It's mainly because you want to tell your friends, 'This used to belong to Mr Joel Barlow'."

laughed Patricia Davison from Redbank, in Brisbane's west. She had brought \$500 and had her eyes set on a Louis Vuitton monogrammed hexagon overnight bag with shoulder strap (from \$200) and Barlow's antique pictorial Bible from the 1880s (from \$100).

Ms Davison flipped through the auction catalogue, 30 disorienting pages of antler coat hangers, 19th-century silver platters; cuckoo clocks; gramophones; Pacman arcade machines; \$95,000 televisions; \$25,000 bottles of grog; chunky gold cross necklaces; and 60 pairs of shoes.

She shook her head. "Money doesn't buy taste," she said.

Paul and Gillian Cross, from Brisbane city, arrived at 8.20am to find the auction house full. They parked their fold-up chairs outside and sat down marking final sale prices on the 810 items on offer in their catalogues. It was a day out.

People laughed, shared sale predictions, scratched their heads in unison at Mr Barlow's taste. That busy, complex Queensland Health purchasing officer was bringing his community together.

"Pure voyeurism," said Vern

Madden, who drove two hours from Toowoomba to witness the bizarre spectacle. "I love the psychology of it. Watching all these people get carried away."

A woman beside Dr Madden rejoiced, having successfully bid on the Louis Vuitton bag Ms Davison was interested in.

"It's a one-off that came out for the 2008 World Cup!" she said ecstatically. "I've been looking for it for a while. It sold brand new for \$3100. I got it for \$2200. Bargain!"

By midday, the auction had become an oven of heaving bidders. "It's just phenomenal," said auctioneer John D'Agata, face dripping with sweat. Mr D'Agata works for Australia's oldest auction house, Leonard Joel.

He'd come from Melbourne to oversee the auction, spending two weeks to shift the collection into the auction house and a further three weeks cataloguing it. "This is probably the biggest crowd we've ever had and easily the biggest auction we've ever had. It's really captured people's imagination. We were looking at between \$200,000 and \$500,000... we'll get the \$500,000 no problem."